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Testimony Opposing HB 534
February 15, 2007, Jackie Williams

Chairman Rice and Members of the Committee, my name is Jackie Williams. I am here before you today to express OPPOSITION to House Bill 534, The Mandatory Helmet Law.

Helmets certainly *can* save lives, under the right conditions. But they can also interfere with a rider's ability to hear and see. As the American Motorcyclists Association puts it, "The most effective way to reduce motorcycle injuries and fatalities is to prevent accidents from occurring. Helmets and helmet laws do not prevent accidents." Statistics show that ninety-two percent of motorcycle accidents involve riders with no formal training. I suggest more emphasis should be placed on rider education programs that are already in place in Montana and less on what one wears while riding.

A statement from the American Motorcyclists Association (AMA) sums up my opposition to this bill: "[Helmet requirements] are a manifestation of the misguided belief that citizens lack the wisdom to make personal safety decisions for themselves and must therefore be subjected to increasingly intrusive laws."

Helmet laws limit a fundamental freedom; the right to make one's own decisions regarding safety. In recent years more and more personal freedoms have been sacrificed to state governments. In light of the nation's disturbing—and growing—acceptance of social-engineering schemes, the question posed by helmet-law foe Stephen W. McDermott is a valid one: "Will anyone be left to stand with you when *your* pastime becomes regulated?"

Motorcycle accidents account for less than one percent of all U.S. health care costs. Contrary to the propaganda of some helmet law activists, America's roads and highways are not littered with the mangled corpses of motorcycle riders. A mere two percent of all vehicles are motorcycles. And while their riders do represent a greater percentage of vehicular fatalities, they account for a smaller percentage of total accidents—just one percent. Furthermore, the nation's motorcycle accident rate is falling, not rising.

Total accidents have dropped by 60 percent since 1985. Bill Brish of the National Coalition of Motorcyclists says, "You are 10 times more likely to die of a head injury in an automobile." There is little evidence to support the oft-cited critique that motorcyclists drain public and private insurance coffers.

Chairman Rice and Members of the Committee, I thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to stop this bill in its tracks. Please vote no.

Jackie Williams
2488 Haystack Dr
East Helena, MT 59635